

"JOT" AND "TITTLE"
by Willis E. Bishop

In Matthew 5:18 Christ said, "not one jot or one tittle shall pass away till all be fulfilled." In Psalm 119 in some Bibles we can see what a "jot" and a "tittle" are. That Psalm is divided into sections based on the Hebrew alphabet, and some Bibles show the Hebrew characters. Psalm 119 is a form of Hebrew poetry.

Hebrew poetry is not like our poetry: "Roses are red/violets are blue/sugar is sweet/and so are you." Our poetry usually has rhyme and rhythm. Hebrew poetry does not have either one of those. Sometimes it is simply an alphabetical arrangement of statements, and that's what we have in the 119th Psalm. Notice, at the heading of the Psalm is the word "aleph," and some Bibles have the Hebrew character printed there. In the Hebrew Bible, every verse, 1 through 8, begins with a word that begins with the letter "aleph." That is a form of Hebrew poetry. Between verses 8 and 9 is the word "beth," and in the Hebrew Bible each verse, 9 through 16, begins with a word that begins with the letter "beth." That is a form of Hebrew poetry.

And so, we go now to "gimel," "daleth," "he," "vau," "zain," "cheth," "teth," "jod." Between verses 72 and 73, "jod," the printed character is just a little apostrophe -- that's the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. That is what Christ referred to when He said "every jot."

Between verses 55 and 56 is the letter "cheth." Notice how it's written. Between verses 32 and 33 is the letter "he." Notice how that is written. Does your eye tell you the difference between "he" and "cheth"? There is very little. "He" has a tiny space between the left vertical bar and the top bar, with no space between the top bar and the right vertical bar. In "cheth," the left and right vertical bars are closed with the top bar. That tiny space in "he" is a tittle. Any part of a Hebrew letter is a tittle.

In Matthew 5:18, Christ said the law is so perfect down to every jot and tittle. Every letter and every part of a letter is inspired by God. When the men who wrote the Scripture finished writing, it was not only letter perfect but part-letter perfect -- perfect absolutely to a part of a letter in the original writings.

This is one of the reasons I am a little uneasy with some of our newer translations. Some of them paraphrase. They are not telling you exactly what the Holy Spirit wrote through these men -- they are simply paraphrasing; i.e., they are telling you what they think the writers meant. Sometimes they leave a word out, and I don't think that's right either. It is far safer to tell us as nearly as possible in our language what the writers wrote. Let interpretation be another matter. A paraphrase should not be called a translation.

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